DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 949 JC 810 405

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TITLE Blitzing Athletic Abuses.
PUB DATE 9 Mar 81
NOTE 18p.: Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of California Community College Administrators (San Diego, CA, March 8-10, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards: Athletes: Athletic Coaches: *Athletics: Cheating: *Community Colleges: *Statewide Planning: Student Recruitment: Two Year Colleges: *Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *Athletic Abuses: *California: California Commission on Athletics

ABSTRACT

After noting recent discoveries of falsified transcripts and other collegiate athletics scandals, this paper discusses the need to maintain academic integrity in athletic programs and defends rules established by the California Commission on Athletics (COA) against charges that they are unfair to community college students. The paper first warns that community colleges are not immune to the cheating that is fostered by a "win at any cost" athletic philosophy and urges administrators to insist on integrity among coaches, honest recruitment practices, and the maintenance of a balance between academics and athletics. Next, charges leveled by the College of the Desert Board of Trustees against three COA rulings are presented and answered. The first rule to be criticized and defended is the "Twenty-Four Unit Rule," which requires students to complete 24 units prior to participating in a second sports season. The defense of this rule includes a description of Merritt College's successful attempt to field a competitive football team and foster the academic growth of the student-athletes through a program of counseling, tutoring, and skills development. The second rule considered requires students who transfer to a community college from a four-year college to complete 12 units in residence before participating in a sports activity. The third rule investigated, is the "No Exception Rule," which does not permit exceptions even in legitimate hardship cases. (JP)

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"BLITZING ATHLETIC ABUSES"

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ACCCA 1981 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ON MISSION BAY IN SAN DIEGO
MARCH 9, 1981

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PROGRAMMING STUDENT-ATHLETES FOR SUCCESS AT MERRITT COLLEGE

"BLITZING ATHLETIC ABUSES"
by
John B. Greene*

In recent months, athletic programs in America have been seriously undermined.

Headlines have told of alleged coaching abuses, false transcripts to keep players eligible, star performers missing classes, and the ordering of stiff conference penalties to some of the leading athletically-minded institutions in the country. If such stories have sent shock waves through the halls of ivy while embarrassing and disturbing those involved in the collegiate sporting world, they have certainly left behind serious tremors in our California community colleges' athletic programs.

Today, most managers espouse to be vitally concerned with these issues as well as the integrity of the sports programs in community colleges. The term "espouse" is used advisedly since the intent here is to stimulate a challenge within the ranks of all California administrators to become actively involved in the current athletic dilemma--the win-at-all cost theory that we have been living with over the years is about to backfire on all of us.

Are our coaches, fellow administrators, and students so slick they can't be caught? Is it just a matter of time until our own college makes unwanted headlines? Or, is the athletic program at our college so clean that scandal really is something that only happens to the other guy? These and similar questions have to be on our minds, if we are conscientious managers.

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Many of our coaches laugh off our concerns as we question them. For one thing they are quick to point out, a college has to have a lot of money to cheat well. We all know that our respective colleges never have the kind of money that state colleges and universities have. And, although false junior college transcripts have been found to be a most obvious violation in sports, the coaches claim that as school administrators we watch the registrar's office so closely that it is virtually impossible to cheat.

As you and I know, it <u>is</u> possible to cheat. There is no way community college managers can monitor everything. When we combine free flow, healthy financial aid packages, booster clubs, influential alumni, disgruntled parents, cheating coaches, egotistical athletes, and four-year college bandits all in one arena, almost anything can, and most certainly will happen.

As Northern California Appeals Committee Chairman for the Commission of Athletics, I can't begin to tell you how many phone calls I get from coaches and administrators complaining about illegal recruiting, disregard for the athletic code, and illegal manipulation of existing rules and regulations by their competitors. Often, I have just finished a phone conversation listening to a complaint about their own school. Since we don't live in glass houses, I suggest we all come inside to get our act together as persons delegated the responsibility for administering respectful athletic programs.

The emphasis here is not to enumerate the numerous ways athletic privileges are abused. Instead, I would like to focus upon the need to mix academics

and athletics so that we reconsider the terms "student-athlete". The subject of academic integrity in community college athletics must be our concern if our students are to come out winners.

In order to "balance the score", that is, the abuses we have so often read about, in order to ensure that our own community college isn't going to be rocked with scandal, each of us has to create a value-oriented program. Our coaches must be selected and assigned with care. They must have integrity when they come to our colleges and we must not allow them to deviate from that integrity. If we believe a coach is cheating, or if we find a violation, we, as college managers, must be the first to bring them to task. Our philosophy must be that if the struggle to win destroys the integrity of our institutions, indeed, the integrity of our very selves, then winning simply isn't worth it.

There is little question in my mind that the "win at any cost" philosophy which pervades athletics in this country is the cornerstone of the scandalous foundation built in many of our athletic departments. In our universities and private colleges, winners draw attention. That is not the incentive in community colleges; yet, our coaches still find ways to abuse the system in order to win. This phenomena isn't about to change easily. Therefore, the only thing for us to do is to begin an aggressive attack on those who cheat.

Several years ago I would have debated the issue of law and order. Today, however, I want the record to reflect that I am a converted law and order man. I suppose that much of this conversion can be attributed to my sitting on the code committee during the past three years and at each quarterly meeting, drafting new code language to build a meek defense against

Some jive coach that has discovered yet another way to beat the system. For those of you who have gone through similar processes, you know what I'm talking about.

The truth is, that we have to have hard, fast rules which force compliance and foster the atmosphere of student development, especially in terms of student athlete development. Let's return to my original thesis on honesty and re-examine the question, "Can an honest program produce a winner when the competition cheats?"

Of course, the answer is yes. An honest program can win. While some colleges can go out and "buy", steal, or proselyte good athletes, our community colleges can go out and recruit good athletes, within the law, as it's written in the Athletic Code Book. We all want to win our conferences by being competitive. There is nothing unusual about that. My college, Merritt College in Oakland, recruits using the theme that we think we're unique. And, there are enough good athletes within our district who can be convinced of that uniqueness to build a super team. We not only sell in terms of a great college with a superb view of the Bay Area, but also in terms of our faculty, our curriculum, our academics and our commitment to making them better persons. At Merritt, the stereotype "dumb athlete with an IQ lower than his age" doesn't fit any of our teams. Our coaches stress the idea of academic preparation and skill development.

To blitz, and therefore defuse, athletic abuses means creating a balance between academics and athletics. If our players are academically motivated,

values concerning honesty are sure to follow. Students must learn they have to make it on their own, that they can't slide through because they're superior athletes. There shouldn't even be ways for marginal students who are great athletes to breeze through school. Academics have to be made important so that our athletes can't hide in class. Academics are tough - I don't have to tell you that. But they must be made our first priority. A few years down the road, our athletes will thank us for insisting on that. Don't misunderstand this as being a back-patting exercise for me. I don't need that at this time. But I want to impress upon you that Merritt College has taken the big step and is attempting to live by example. We all have experienced too much failure in the student/athlete component of our athletic programs. As administrators, we simply must do something about this failure.

I want to share with you my personal and professional response to a letter all of our colleges received recently from the College of the Desert Board of Trustees. This letter sets forth numerous charges against the current leadership of the Commission on Athletics:

Charge #1: The Twenty-Four Unit Rule

The COA has no right to require a student to complete 24 units prior to participating in a second season of sport. The letter goes much further than this in giving its view of the terrible things the COA has done to athletes.

THE TWENTY-FOUR UNIT RULE - As presented by the College of the Desert Board of Trustees

This rule is sometimes called the normal progress rule and is

not in the best interest of student/athletes. Section 1.032 of the State Athletic Code states: "No scholarships or grants-in-aid may be awarded . . . if athletic competence is the principal criterion for selection." We are aware that in terms of financial assistance, the student/athlete shall not be treated differently than any other student. Yet, in a great many other aspects of our educational system, that student/athlete is treated differently. By doing so, we have placed the student/athlete in a financial burden and have subjected them to undue mental pressures that most other students do not have to endure. We have programed many student/athletes to failure. Code Section 5.031 and others in that category reminds us of those differences. The student/athlete must be enrolled in a minimum of twelve (12) units at our colleges during the season of sport in which they participate. Do we expect as much from any other student who is not receiving financial assistance? The rules then expect the student/athlete to pass twenty-four (24) units between seasons of that same sport to again participate in that college activity. Do we expect so much from any other student?

Large numbers of our student/athletes, in addition to carrying a full load, must practice for his sport, pay rent, buy food, books, and sometimes pay tuition. The twenty-four (24) unit rule has further placed a burden on an out-of-season athlete because it keeps them from working during the off-season to ease the financial burden incurred during the season. They are in fact,

forced to be full-time students, full-time athletes and full-time employees during the college year. Do we expect as much from other students?

Other athletic organizations throughout the Nation (N.C.A.A., N.A.I.A., N.J.C.A.A.) recognize that the student/athlete has needs which are different from other students. They help the financial burden of their student/athlete by offering grants-in-aid. This student/athlete then can concentrate on academic classes and his sport, not on working for financial assistance. Should the California Community Colleges consider doing the same or should the rules be changed back to their former status?

My Response to Charge #1

I have a position on this subject that differs a great deal from the originators. First of all, as a member of the Code Committee, I must admit I had a significant influence on the writing and the passage of this new rule. If we continue to support the theme that students and athletics are synonymous, then the expectation of a student to complete 24 units over two semester periods (not to mention summers) is not out of the question. Today, we take our high-risk students (those receiving financial assistance and EOPS), and require a similar unit completion ration. Why shouldn't we do the same for athletes? More importantly, I am concerned about the terrible academic condition so many of our athletes end up in after going to college for two years.

The norm for athletes is a minimal academic standard - one that survives on mediocrity and "the do-as-little-as-you-have-to-to-get-by syndrome". We all see the end results of this kind of attitude. We know athletes are busy on the field and in the gym; it's about time we start making them busy in the classroom.

I could go on incessantly spouting off my theory on academic performance and its relevancy to a lofty social position. However, all I'm really talking about is making certain that our student athletes have a chance to develop their mental capacities. In some cases, we just need to make sure that they learn the basics of an educational foundation.

I want to make it clear that I'm not just talking theory when I suggest that we have to re-merge the words student and athlete. Let me take a few minutes to share with you the Merritt experience as an example of what can be done with today's so-called impossible athlete. Often, I've heard such comments as, "We can't do anything with them;" "You know the kind of kids we attract." Well, at Merritt College we finally decided to find out if we can make a difference in the academic development of student athletes. Recently, we started a football program after a three-year hiatus. I was determined that whoever we hired to do the coaching would also be the kind of person who would work as diligently at seeing to it that students attend classes. The second component had to be a support services component, one that would establish an atmosphere conducive to the students' learning. We knew that many of the students coming in as football players would also be coming in with many other

deficiencies. We therefore developed a program with counseling, tutoring services, academic skills development services, and other support systems. Since we realized that many of these students could not be mainstreamed at the beginning, we developed a federal Title III grant which, as one of its components, would create a program that would refer student athletes to our support services. We hired four teachers, a counselor, and a director to work in the program. After all the recruits for the football program were pre-tested to determine their operational grade levels, we assigned them to appropriate classes. Some of our athletes were functioning at college level and therefore mainstreamed. Those who were deficient were assigned to programs where they could develop their basic skills. The point I'm making is that each one of the students received individual attention. And, the coaching staff, as well as the assigned counselor, were held responsible for coordinating the service. Merritt's goal was to produce a football team consisting of students who had athletic skills. We were not interested in perpetuating the myth that athletes do not care anything about being students. Needless to say, a lot of work, a lot of time, and a lot of energy went into the monitoring of this program. We started the program in June of 1980, indicating that we didn't have a chance to recruit early. Surprisingly enough, Merritt finished the season with a conference record of five wins and four losses, which was good enough for third place. That in itself was somewhat phenomenal, especially when you consider all of the problems blocking the development of the program. Prior to cancellation of the program, the team went one and eight. From one and eight in 1977, and a two year exodus from the

sport, to five and six in 1980 is a big improvement. What happened to the students enrolled in the program is even more significant. After the end of the first term, statistics showed what happened to the players who participated in the football program. Allow me to share some of the numbers with you.

Sixty-five students suited up. Ten dropped out or cut themselves. Ten were injured during the course of the season and had to discontinue their participation. So, 43 players suited up for the last game. Thirty-eight students completed and averaged 14.2 units, with five finishing the semester with less than 12 units.

Three students had a 4.0 G.P.A.; eight had a 3.5 or better; and 21 were 3.0 or better. Eleven were 2.0 or better. The overall grade point average of the 43 in the group was 3.19.

The Merritt College football roster for the Fall 1980 - Spring 1981 School year contains the names of 43 students. The fall and spring class schedules of these students were compiled, and are attached to this report.

The source of information for the schedules was the data processing report, Status of Students. The Fall 1980 report is the final for this semester, so grades and units completed are shown. The Spring 1981 report is current as of March 4, 1981 (over two weeks prior to the last day to add classes), so some of the schedules may already have changes. It is important to note that the active units listed for spring do not include any courses with variable units. Many English and mathematics classes have variable units.

The football students' mean average units completed in Fall 1980 was 13.2. The team's average cumulative GPA was 3.19 at the end of fall semester. Individual grade point averages are catagorized below:

Students with 4.00 GPA	3
3.50-3.99	8
3.00-3.49	21
2.50-2.99	6
2.00-2.49	5

No student had a grade point average lower than 2.00.

There was a special program to place the football athletes who were underprepared in basic skills subjects into Title III classes on campus. Nineteen of the forty-three players were enrolled in one or more of these courses. The individual enrollment and final grades for the Title III classes only are shown below:

		GRADES						
Course	N of Students	A	B	C	CR	I	NCR	W
ENGL 248A (composition)	11	2	1	5	2	1		
ENGL 248B (reading)	5		2		2		1	
MATH 148A	11		1	2	8			
PSYCH 050	2				2			
SPCH 248A	2							2

The average number of units for the nineteen students enrolled in Title III classes was 14.9; and the average GPA was 3.32--both are higher than the team average.

Of the nineteen Fall Title III students, twelve re-enrolled in at least one Spring Title III class, and five enrolled in a higher-level English or Math class. Two team members signed up for Title III courses in the Spring that had not done so in the Fall.

Critics could question whether the program was watered down to meet the level of the students' capabilities. I'm not about to defend the methods of instruction for these kids because many of them were operating at extremely low levels. They certainly fit the typical community college student profile in terms of economic status and academic levels of preparation.

At Merritt, there was a lot of teaching and coaching follow-up going on with these youngsters. It was absolutely mandatory that a profile be built on every kid in the program so that we knew full well what happened to each of them. We knew the successes as well as the failures. These students were a small sample of what could be done. In the coming year, we intend to expand these efforts into all the athletic programs at the college. Now, I'm not suggesting that all community college managers run out and obtain a federal grant to provide a support services program. What I am suggesting is that if we as administrators are serious about the control of our athletic programs, then we have to set the pace for those individuals that are responsible for coaching and playing in them.

Charge #2: THE TRANSFER RULE - As presented by College of the Desert Board of Trustees

The Transfer Rule, as it applies to the student/athlete who transfers from a four (4) year college or university to a community college, is not in the best interest of the

student/athlete. This rule requires twelve (12) units in residence that must be passed before an athlete can participate in a college sports activity. Do we ask this same requirement of any other student who transfers back to a community college from a four-year institution? The community college, philosophically, is a second chance institution for many students and to penalize a student for returning to a community college for financial, emotional and other reasons beyond their control is looked at as unreasonable by our Board of Trustees.

My Response to Charge #2

It's been stated that the transfer rule is inadequate and that it prevents students from an opportunity to participate. Well, I'm not capable of refuting those arguments. But, I do believe in the transfer rule. We all know the tremendous number of problems that developed when the free-flow and the 18-year old residency law was established. Students were flip-flopping all over the place. They were moving from campus to campus, coach to coach, and sport to sport without any sense of decency. They certainly had little concern for the sports programs within the colleges. Given this as a departure point, it became quite clear that we were running baby-sitting services for ego-maniacal individuals who were holding us hostage in our own programs. Kids were transferring from three and four different colleges during one season of sport. The committee would have been without credibility had we not developed some kind of rule to prevent these activities from taking place.

I'm not arguing that the transfer rule is absolutely the best thing that ever happened. And, I'm not arguing against the fact that a 12-unit residency is an impossible hardship either. But it's my opinion that if an individual is serious about his education, he or she will benefit from having to obtain 12 units prior to participating in a sport. Let's don't fool ourselves about those 12 units. We all know how easy it is for students to get 12 units if there's some planning to his or her decision to attend college.

The third charge deals with the no exception rule, more commonly known as the hardship rule. With the elimination of such a hardship rule, community college administrators have agonized because they have no recourse to make exceptions for those students who have legitimate problems and require additional consideration in order for them to participate. We obviously need to go a little bit further in developing some kind of a system for the legitimate cases.

Charge #3: THE EXCEPTION RULE - As presented by College of the Desert Board of Trustees

The removal of the Exception Rule (3.072) from the State Athletic Code is a removal of the opportunity for an athletic conference to govern themselves and to make adjustments to the athletic rules when it is in the best interest of the student/athletes involved. This is another form of State Control and a loss of Local Control. Many times, students are placed into situations that are beyond their control. Who is in the better position to deal with these situations for the student/athlete, the local athletic conference, made up on participating colleges

or a State-wide Committee established by the C.C.J.C.A. Commission on Athletics? Each student/athlete's case, in the past, has been studied on its own merit. The welfare of the student and the sport in question has been of primary concern to the Athletic Conference. The students 'Due Process' rights have been changed with the removal of the Exception Rule.

My Response to Charge #3

In defense of the elimination of the hardship rule, the inconsistency of the way the rule was interpreted and used, mis-used, and abused, was the prevailing factor which promulgated the decision to eliminate the hardship rule. Coaches, conferences, and athletic directors were all using that rule to make any and everybody eligible regardless of the situation. The volume of abuses and complaints about people being made eligible were so numerous, the committee felt compelled to eliminate the whole thing.

Needless to say, the jury is still out as to whether or not that was the best decision to make. It certainly isn't a decision that one goes around bragging about. But when you have a cause and effect situation, or an effect and cause situation, you simply can't remain in limbo. You have to make a decision, and our decision was to eliminate the whole hardship clause. Currently, the Code Committee is now wrestling with approaches to legitimizing true hardship from make-believe hardship, which, in the near future, will bring some adjustments.

In conclusion, then, as we move into the 80's each of us in management must be ever more concerned about violations, more concerned about tight parameters, and more concerned about student athletes missing classes to attend games. So far, our California community colleges have avoided the major problems. We simply don't have many students scrambling to stay eligible, which always causes maneuvering, inevitably leading to dishonesty. Let's hire honest coaches and recruit honest students and encourage them to stay that way. Our coaches don't have to be afraid of losing their jobs following a bad season. If it takes years to be successful, that's all right. We can build teams the right way without short cuts that lead to violations.

Images of our colleges must be solid. Since athletics present a high profile, we are visible. We want our programs to be successful, but not at the cost we have recently observed at some colleges.

JBG:kk

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